

105 Prepositions

Prepositions are words that are used to show relationships between different parts of a clause, for example relationships of time, place, or reason.

See also:

Infinitives and participles **51** Verbs with prepositions **54**
Singular and plural nouns **69** Personal pronouns **77**

105.1 SIMPLE PREPOSITIONS

Prepositions describe the relationship between two other words. They are usually part of a prepositional phrase, which is made up of a preposition followed by an object (a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase).

There's a beautiful park **by** my house.

"By" describes where the park is in relation to the house.



Chrissy goes to the gym **on** Wednesdays.

"On" helps to describe when Chrissy goes to the gym.



105.2 COMPLEX PREPOSITIONS

Some prepositions are made up of two words which act as a single unit. They behave the same way as one-word prepositions.

The bank is **next to** the library.



105.3 PARALLEL PREPOSITIONS

When the same preposition applies to more than one word in a list, the preposition only needs to be used once.

I sent presents **to** Al and [to] Ed.



When different words need different prepositions, each preposition must be used.

Look **at** and listen **to** the teacher.



105.4 PREPOSITIONS AND GERUNDS

If a verb comes immediately after a preposition, it has to be a gerund, which is the “-ing” form of a verb.



After **graduating**, I worked in a hospital.

Preposition

Gerund



FURTHER EXAMPLES

Instead of **applying** for a job, I went to college.



After **seeing** the job listing, I wrote a cover letter.



105.5 PREPOSITIONS AT THE END OF SENTENCES

Prepositions can come in many different places in a sentence, including at the end.

I'm listening **to** some music. ✓

I like having something to listen **to**. ✓



105.6 "TO"

"To" can cause confusion because it can be a preposition, but it is also used to form infinitives.

Here, "to" is part of the infinitive verb "to see." When used like this, it is not a preposition.

Here, "to" is part of the phrasal verb "look forward to," and is a preposition. Therefore, it must be followed by a noun, pronoun, or gerund.

I'm going **to** see my friends tonight.



I'm looking forward **to** seeing them.

Gerund

106 Prepositions of place

Prepositions of place are used to relate the position or location of one thing to another. Using a different preposition usually changes the meaning of a sentence.

See also:

Question words 35

Prepositions 105

106.1 "IN," "AT," AND "ON"

"In" is used to position something or someone inside a large area or in a three-dimensional space.

The Louvre is **in** Paris.



David is **in** his bedroom.

"In" positions David inside his bedroom.



"At" is used to talk about an exact point.

Turn left **at** the next corner.



Let's meet **at** the restaurant.



"On" is used to position something in line with, next to, on top of, or attached to something else.

I love traveling **on** trains.



There's a spider **on** the floor!



FURTHER EXAMPLES

They live **in** a hot country.



I will meet you **at** the beach.



I like that picture **on** the wall.



The dog is sleeping **in** his basket.



Jane is working **at** her desk.



The books are **on** the table.



106.2 PRECISE PREPOSITIONS OF PLACE

Some prepositions of place show the precise position or location of something in relation to something else. They can be used to answer a "where" question.



The bird is flying
above the cat.



The bird is sitting
on top of the tree.



The dog usually sits
between Ed and Ben.



The cat is {
under
underneath
beneath
below} the table.



Jack is {
next to
near} the tree.



The basket is
in front of the cat.



Jack is hiding
behind the tree.



Sally sits **opposite**
Fred at work.

FURTHER EXAMPLES

There's a sign **above** the door.



There's a mouse **underneath** the bed!



My house is **near** a lovely park.



The table is **opposite** the television.



I was stuck **behind** a truck
all the way home.



I like those photos
on top of the bookshelf.



107 Prepositions of time

Prepositions of time are often used to talk about schedules and routines. They give information about when something happens, and how long it lasts.

See also:

Present perfect continuous 12

Prepositions 105

107.1 "ON"

"On" is often used before days of the week to say when something happens.

I work **on** Mondays.

In US English the preposition can be left out.

"-s" can be added to the day of the week to show that the thing happens regularly on that day.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

The library is closed **on** Sundays.



I'm going shopping **on** Saturday.



I have orchestra practice **on** Fridays.



I'll visit my grandparents **on** Monday.



107.2 "AT"

"At" is usually used to express what time something happens.

I leave the house **at** 8am.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

They are meeting **at** 1 o'clock.



I have an appointment **at** 7 o'clock.



I have a yoga class **at** lunchtime.



I get the bus **at** half past 8.



107.3 "ON" AND "AT" WITH "THE WEEKEND"

When talking about the weekend, US English uses "on," whereas UK English uses "at."



I watch TV { on / at } the weekend.

"On the weekend" is more common in the US.

"At the weekend" is more common in the UK.

107.4 "IN"

"In" has a similar meaning as "during" and is used before months, years, seasons, and general times of day, e.g. "morning" and "afternoon."

I go to the gym in the morning.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

I usually watch TV in the evening.



She's going to Europe in June.



I was born in 1973.



I enjoy gardening in summer.



107.5 "PAST" AND "TO"

"Past" and "to" are prepositions of time that are mainly used when telling the time.

"Past" means "after the hour."

It's twenty past seven.



"To" means "until the hour."

It's twenty to seven.



107.6 PREPOSITIONS SHOWING DURATION

"From... to..." or "between... and..." are used to say when an activity starts and finishes.

"From" is used to say the time something starts.

I work **from** 9am **to** 5pm.

"To" is used to say the time something finishes.

"Between" is used to say the time something starts.

I work **between** 9am **and** 5pm.

"And" is used to say the time something finishes.



"Until" can be used to say when an ongoing situation finishes.

"UNTIL" + TIME OR DATE

I will be working **until** five o'clock.



"Since" can be used to say when an ongoing situation started.

"SINCE" + TIME OR DATE

I have been working **since** 9am.



"For" can be used to express how long something has been happening.

"FOR" + QUANTITY OF TIME

I have been working **for** six hours.



"During" can be used to express when something was happening, rather than how long it went on for.

I relaxed **during** my break.





COMMON MISTAKES TENSES WITH "SINCE"

"Since" is usually used with perfect tenses with reference to the past. It is not used with the present simple.

The present perfect continuous is often used with since.

Tim has been **working** here since last year. ✓

Tim works here since last year. ✗

Since can't be used with the present simple.

107.7 OTHER PREPOSITIONS OF TIME

"By" is used to talk about when something will be done or finished. It means "at" or "before."

"BY" + TIME

I will finish this report **by** 3pm.



NOW



3PM

"Before" is used to talk about something that happens prior to something else or a certain time.

"BEFORE" + TIME

I will finish work **before** 6 o'clock.



NOW



6PM

"After" is used to refer to an event that follows another event.

I'll clean the tables **after** my break.



NOW



BREAK



FUTURE

108 Other prepositions

Prepositions can be used to express relationships other than place and time, such as origin, ownership, and absence.

See also:

The passive **24** Verb patterns with prepositions **54** Prepositions **105**

108.1 "BY"

"By" has several common uses in English.

When used to talk about an action, it refers to something that is done to achieve a certain result.

RESULT ACTION
I fixed my television **by** hitting it.



It is used to say who wrote or made something.

I'm reading *1984* **by** George Orwell.



It is used to talk about methods of travel.

I always go to work **by** train.



"On foot" is an exception to this rule.

It can be used to form the passive voice.

This was painted **by** a famous artist.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

I broke my phone **by** dropping it in a puddle.



It's too far to walk into town.
It's much easier to go **by** bus.



This show is based on a short story **by** Jane Austen.



That new building was designed **by** a famous architect.



108.2 "WITH" AND "WITHOUT"

"With" has several common uses in English.

It can mean "accompanied by."

I went to a restaurant **with** my wife.



It is used to talk about possession.

I want a job **with** a good salary.



It is used to talk about the thing used to perform an action.

I cut this apple **with** a knife.



"Without" is used to talk about the absence of something.

Vera came to the party **without** a gift.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

I need to move somewhere **with** better phone reception.



I need to hire someone **with** excellent computer skills.



Christina paid for the dress **with** her credit card.



Wait! Don't leave **without** me!



108.3 "ABOUT"

"About" is mainly used to mean "on the subject of."

I'm watching a documentary **about** Ancient Greece.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

I'm going to call the bank **about** their bad service.



I'm sorry, but I have no idea what you're talking **about**.



109 Dependent prepositions

Some words must be followed by a specific preposition, called a dependent preposition. These words can be adjectives, verbs, or nouns.

See also:

Types of verbs **49** Singular and plural nouns **69**

Adjectives **92** Prepositions **105**

109.1 ADJECTIVES WITH DEPENDENT PREPOSITIONS

Some adjectives are always followed by the same preposition when used in a sentence.

ADJECTIVE + PREPOSITION

It was **good of** my friend to offer to babysit last night.



Some adjectives can take one of a choice of prepositions in the same sentence without changing their meaning.

"Surprised" can be followed by either "at" or "by" without a change in meaning.

You seemed **surprised** **at/by** their behavior.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

The babysitter was **angry about** looking after naughty children.



My parents are **annoyed with** me for not cleaning my room.



My friends are getting **ready for** their new baby.



The children are **impressed by** practical jokes.



Janine is **tired of** watching children's shows on TV.



She is **excited about** going hiking in the mountains.



109.2 VERBS WITH DEPENDENT PREPOSITIONS

Some verbs are followed by a specific preposition before an object. Different verbs are followed by different prepositions.

VERB + PREPOSITION



The head chef used to **shout at** the staff to encourage them to work harder.

FURTHER EXAMPLES

The café was **counting on** the new menu to impress its customers.



The café **advertised for** another chef to join the team.



The head chef **spoke to** the manager about hiring more kitchen staff.



What do you **think about** leaving early on Fridays?



109.3 VERBS WITH "TO" OR "FOR"

Some verbs can take either "to" or "for," depending on the context. "To" is usually used when there is a transfer of something, whereas "for" is used when someone benefits from something.



He **sold** the house **to** the family.

[The family bought the house.]



He **sold** the house **for** the family.

[He sold the house on behalf of the family.]

109.4 NOUNS WITH DEPENDENT PREPOSITIONS

Some nouns are always followed by the same preposition when used in a sentence.

NOUN + PREPOSITION

I always keep a **photograph of** my family on my desk.



Some nouns can take one of a choice of prepositions in the same sentence without changing their meaning.

"Advantages" can be followed by either "in" or "to" without a change in meaning.



There are **advantages** { **in** / **to** } moving away to study.

FURTHER EXAMPLES

It is important to have a positive **attitude toward** studying.



The **cause of** traffic jams is often bad town planning.



I've been working hard to find a **solution to** this problem.



There has been a steady **increase in** students passing their exams.



The **demand for** public buses increases every year.



Take your time planning a **response to** the essay question.



109.5 WORDS WITH DIFFERENT DEPENDENT PREPOSITIONS

Some adjectives, verbs, and nouns can be followed by a choice of prepositions. The meaning of the phrase is dependent on which preposition the adjective, verb, or noun is paired with.

I'm **anxious for** my vacation to start.

[I'm excited for my vacation.]



I'm **anxious about** being late for my flight.

[I'm worried I'm going to miss my flight.]



He **talked to** the teacher.

[He had a conversation with the teacher.]



He **talked about** the teacher.

[He had a conversation with someone else, discussing the teacher.]



I have a good **relationship with** my parents.

[The relationship between me and my parents is good.]



The **relationship between** family members is important.

[It's important that family members have a good relationship.]



FURTHER EXAMPLES

I'm **upset about** how badly my exams went.



I'm **upset with** myself for failing my exams.



The charity needs to **appeal for** more volunteers.



The campaigns **appeal to** students.



Pests are a serious **problem for** farmers.



Farmers have a serious **problem with** pests.

